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EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE
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Forty-third session

UNHCR EVALUATION ACTIVITIES

A. Introduction

1. Since the forty-second session of the Executive Committee in October 1991, UNHCR has focused its evaluation activities on operations and issues which are of pressing concern to the organization, and has continued its efforts to ensure that evaluation recommendations are taken into account in the processes of policy development, strategic planning, and programme design. The Central Evaluation Section has strengthened its collaboration with other units within UNHCR, including the Emergency Preparedness and Response Section, the Training Section, and the Programme and Technical Support Section. At the same time, closer working relationships have been established with evaluation units and research organizations within and outside of the United Nations system.

2. The work of the Central Evaluation Section continues to be guided by an Evaluation Committee, whose members include the Deputy High Commissioner, Director of International Protection, Controller and Deputy Controller. This committee selects the operations, activities and issues which are to be reviewed by the Central Evaluation Section, on the basis of organizational priorities, urgent needs and strategic planning requirements. The Evaluation Committee is also responsible for reviewing the conclusions and recommendations of the Central Evaluation Unit and ensuring that appropriate follow-up action is taken.

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3. Since October 1991, the Central Evaluation Section has completed a detailed study of UNHCR's capacity to respond to emergency situations, based primarily on a review of the organization's performance during the Persian Gulf crisis, but also examining the experience accumulated by UNHCR in other parts of the world over the past ten years. In addition, the Section participated in an independent evaluation of United Nations coordination in the Persian Gulf region, carried out at the request of the newly established United Nations Department of Humanitarian Affairs. Additional reviews have been undertaken of UNHCR operations in Kenya, and of UNHCR's logistic activities, both of which are directly related to the issue of emergency preparedness and response.

4. UNHCR's role, presence and strategy in Western Europe has formed the other principal theme of the evaluations undertaken during the past year. Two reviews have been completed, one of UNHCR operations in the northern part of the region, and another of those in the southern half of the Continent. These evaluations were requested by the High Commissioner, in the context of a strategic planning exercise being undertaken by the Regional Bureau for Europe.

5. The nature and scope of UNHCR's evaluation activities during the past twelve months has been determined in part by staffing considerations. Like many other units within the Office, the Central Evaluation Section has been affected by the need to redeploy personnel from their normal functions to emergency operations. One of the Section's three professional staff members was on emergency duty in the field throughout much of the period under review, and was reassigned to the Emergency Preparedness and Response Section in early 1992. While UNHCR was able to identify a number of external consultants to assist in evaluation activities, the absence of a Central Evaluation Section staff member, coupled with the need to manage the projects undertaken by consultants, inevitably reduced the section's capacity to plan, carry out and follow up in-depth reviews of UNHCR operations.

B. Review of UNHCR emergency preparedness and response in the Persian Gulf crisis

6. One of the principal evaluations undertaken during the past year examined UNHCR's performance in recent emergency operations, with special reference to the Iraqi refugee emergency of April to August 1991.

7. The review noted that emergency operations cannot be managed as if they were regular programmes running at an accelerated pace. In the Persian Gulf, as in other recent humanitarian emergencies, UNHCR's capacity to act quickly and decisively was limited by the absence of structures, systems and procedures designed to meet the specific demands of a large-scale and rapidly evolving emergency.

8. Amongst the evaluation's principle recommendations was a proposal for the creation of an internal working group to undertake a systematic

examination of the policy and protection issues now confronting UNHCR. Drawing on the results of previous evaluations, the review identified the principles of effective emergency management and argued that those principles should be upheld by senior management and form the basis of UNHCR's emergency planning and training activities.

9. In a detailed examination of human resource issues, the report presented a strategy that would assist UNHCR to ensure the rapid deployment of appropriately experienced, trained and equipped UNHCR personnel in emergency situations. In addition, the review proposed that UNHCR should establish standby arrangements and introduce other general preparedness measures, enabling the Office to draw upon the logistic and relief capacity of States.

10. Many of these recommendations have now been implemented. As suggested, a Working Group on International Protection has been established to undertake the fundamental policy review proposed in the evaluation report. The Emergency Preparedness and Response Section has also introduced an integrated package of measures intended to enhance UNHCR's operational effectiveness. Among the measures introduced are: the appointment of five Emergency Preparedness and Response Officers (EPRO) and the formation of regional Emergency Response Teams (ERT); the conclusion of standby staffing agreements with several governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs); the introduction of new emergency stockpiling and transport arrangements for relief items and equipment; and the identification of agencies which can act as UNHCR implementing partners in emergency operations. The Central Evaluation Section's report has also been used extensively for in-house training purposes, both at Headquarters and in the field.

C. Review of United Nations coordination of the international humanitarian response to the Persian Gulf crisis

11. Following its review of UNHCR's response to the Iraqi refugee crisis and other recent emergencies, the Central Evaluation Section was invited to participate in an independent study of United Nations coordination in the Persian Gulf crisis, commissioned by the Geneva office of the newly established Department of Humanitarian Affairs. The Section seconded a staff member to this initiative, which was undertaken by the Humanitarianism and War Project, based at the Refugee Policy Group and Brown University in the United States of America.

12. The review assessed the effectiveness of coordination within the United Nations system, as well as the United Nations' coordinating role vis-à-vis host and donor Governments, the Coalition Forces and NGOs. The report concluded that while many United Nations officials worked tirelessly to assure that humanitarian needs were met, the United Nations as a system was unable to coordinate the international community's response in an effective manner.

13. The study's central recommendation called for the designation of a single individual in a given country or region, for the duration of a major emergency, who would assure effective coordination of, and accountability for,

the United Nations system's humanitarian response. In addition, the report argued that the United Nations agencies should delegate greater authority to the field, develop common emergency procedures relating to the mobilization of human, material and financial resources, and strengthen their working relationships with donor and host Governments. The Department of Humanitarian Affairs, the evaluation stated, should gather, analyze and share data relating to emergencies, and take the lead in the formulation of system-wide action plans and appeals.

14. Arguing that effective coordination was not only a responsibility of the United Nations system, the report suggested that the NGOs should develop a more concerted and consistent approach to emergency relief operations. At the same time, States should provide resources for humanitarian emergencies in a way that facilitates rather than obstructs the coordinating role of the United Nations. The report also called on the international community to give greater consideration to the emerging role of the United Nations in the post-cold-war era, and suggested that political and military activities endorsed by the Security Council should be undertaken with due regard for their humanitarian consequences.

15. This report has been submitted to the United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, and will be presented to the 1992 review of coordination issues in the Economic and Social Council of the General Assembly.

D. Review of UNHCR operations in Kenya

16. In the second half of 1991 and first half of 1992, a Central Evaluation Section staff member undertook an extended mission to Kenya. In addition to assuming operational responsibilities within the Branch Office, the staff member completed an evaluation of UNHCR activities in Kenya. The review focused on the situation of urban refugees in Nairobi and on UNHCR's response to the growing influx of refugees from the Horn of Africa in the north of the country.

17. The review concluded that the Branch Office in Nairobi needed to be reinforced to deal with its growing workload, and emphasized the need for field offices to be managed by more experienced UNHCR personnel. In addition, the report highlighted the difficulties which UNHCR had experienced in identifying suitable NGO partners in the initial phase of the emergency. The review provided a detailed assessment of the food and non-food relief assistance provided to refugees in Kenya, and presented recommendations for improvement in sectors such as water, health and sanitation, shelter and community services. Particular emphasis was given to the assistance and protection needs of vulnerable refugee women and children.

18. Shortly after this evaluation was completed, the scale of the emergency in Kenya increased dramatically, with substantial new refugee influxes arriving from Ethiopia, Somalia and the Sudan. The Central Evaluation Section staff member who had completed the review remained in the country, and was

reassigned to the post of Emergency Coordinator. In this capacity, he was able to implement a number of the recommendations contained in the review, especially those relating to Branch and Field Office staffing.

E. Review of UNHCR logistics policies and practices

19. The growing scale and frequency of refugee emergencies, coupled with the imminent prospect of several large-scale voluntary repatriation operations, has generated an increasing awareness of the need to reinforce UNHCR's capacity in the logistics sector. In order to provide specific recommendations in this area, an evaluation mission was undertaken in six African countries in the first half of 1992.

20. The review noted that some of the variables which determine the effectiveness of a refugee logistics operation are beyond the direct control of UNHCR. Nevertheless, the Office does have a major influence on the outcome of refugee relief operations, particularly in the early stages of an emergency, when key decisions are made about the extent and nature of UNHCR's involvement, the choice of implementing partners, and the control and reporting procedures which are built into the logistics system.

21. The evaluation proposed that UNHCR should assume direct responsibility for logistics functions such as transport, storage and distribution only in situations where reliable implementing partners are not available. In order to strengthen UNHCR's coordinating role and to provide the organization with an enhanced operational capacity, the review made a series of recommendations, including: the creation of a logistics focal point at UNHCR Headquarters; the development of standardized logistics systems and procedures; improved use of information systems and telecommunications equipment; and the professionalization of the logistics function through training, career development and external recruitment.

22. This evaluation of UNHCR logistics policies and practices is being considered by an internal task force, consisting of representatives from the Supplies and Food Aid Section, Programme and Technical Support Section, and other relevant units within the Office. Their recommendations will be submitted to senior management and the Evaluation Committee.

F. Survey of UNHCR operations in Western Europe

23. The demands made upon UNHCR's offices in Western Europe have changed considerably in scale and character over the last few years. In late 1991, the High Commissioner, in conjunction with the Regional Bureau for Europe and Division of International Protection, requested the Central Evaluation Section to undertake a review of UNHCR operations in Western Europe and to make recommendations concerning the organization's role and presence in the region. The evaluation was completed in two phases, examining firstly the northern and secondly the southern countries of Western Europe.

24. The first review concluded that, if UNHCR is to ensure the proper protection of refugees, the organization must communicate consistent policies and positions to both Governments and NGOs. The Office should maximize its impact by giving priority to activities such as advocacy, public information, training and network-building. Tasks relating to individual refugees and asylum-seekers should in principle be devolved to national organizations and networks. The report concluded that, while a strong UNHCR presence in the Western European countries is needed, Branch Offices should be staffed by personnel who possess the skills and seniority required for a more proactive strategy.

25. Following the preparation of this review, the Division of International Protection and the Working Group on International Protection have undertaken detailed reviews of UNHCR's position on a broad range of key asylum issues. In February 1992, the report was presented to a two-day meeting of UNHCR's Western European Representatives, convened in the context of a strategic planning exercise being undertaken by the Regional Bureau for Europe. Chaired by the High Commissioner, the meeting discussed the issues raised in the report and endorsed the strategy which it proposed. Representatives in the countries concerned are now submitting workplans to the Regional Bureau, indicating how this strategy will be implemented at the national level.

26. As recommended in the report, Branch Offices in the region are to pursue a more active approach to the promotion of UNHCR's principles, and will seek to build up a broader constituency of support amongst national opinion leaders and the general public. New training opportunities are to be actively exploited. Greater emphasis will also be placed on the development of national structures which can provide direct services to refugees and assist UNHCR to monitor asylum procedures.

G. Survey of UNHCR operations in Southern Europe

27. The Central Evaluation Section's survey of UNHCR activities in the southern states of the European Community encouraged Branch Offices to exploit the favourable circumstances which currently exist in the region: a relatively manageable refugee situation; positive official attitudes; new asylum structures and procedures, well suited to local conditions; and active support from NGOs.

28. The report pointed to the growing public and political awareness of refugee issues in Southern Europe, largely created by recent influxes from Eastern Europe and the increasing attention given to asylum questions within the European Community. In these circumstances, the report suggested, UNHCR should develop its national base by working in close cooperation with national refugee councils, delegating an increasing number of functions to these agencies, and encouraging them to become financially independent.

29. The review recommended an integrated strategy combining advocacy, public information and fund-raising, intended to raise the profile of UNHCR and

national refugee councils as the asylum issue grows in importance. Given the region's limited exposure to refugee questions and the general lack of governmental and non-governmental personnel with expertise in this area, training activities should be greatly expanded.

30. This review has been submitted to the High Commissioner, and will be discussed at a strategic planning meeting attended by Representatives in Southern Europe, scheduled for July 1992. Implementation of the recommended strategy will then commence at national level.

H. External evaluations

31. The Central Evaluation Section has provided support for two major evaluations of UNHCR activities. The first is being undertaken by the United Nations Central Evaluation Unit in New York, in response to a recommendation made by the Economic and Social Council's Committee on Programme and Coordination. This review focuses on a wide range of issues, including: UNHCR's mandate; coordination and early warning; training; the promotion and dissemination of refugee law; media coverage of UNHCR activities; and the annual financial cycle.

32. The second external evaluation, carried out on behalf of the International Humanitarian Assistance Division of the Canadian International Development Agency, is intended to provide a broad institutional overview of UNHCR and its management systems. Special attention is being given to the issues of UNHCR management effectiveness; funding and budgeting processes; human resource management; and women's programmes.

I. Future work

33. Following the completion of the annual target review exercise and the recent meeting of the Working Group on International Protection, the Central Evaluation Section has held extensive consultations with other UNHCR units concerning future evaluation activities. A provisional workplan and evaluation strategy paper are in preparation, and will be presented to the Evaluation Committee.

34. Voluntary repatriation programmes and the lessons that can be learned from regional approaches to refugee problems are likely to be a principal focus of the Central Evaluation Section's work in the coming year. A mission has been planned to review UNHCR's Quick Impact Project (QIP) initiative for returnee areas in Nicaragua and to assess the potential of this model for repatriation programmes in other parts of the world. This evaluation will be linked to a broader study of the International Conference on Central American Refugees (CIREFCA) process in Central America. Additional work on emergency operations and procedures is also envisaged, undertaken, where possible, in consultation with the Department of Humanitarian Affairs.